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To cite this article: Cheryl R. Jorgensen#Earp (1990) The lady, the whore, and the spinster: The rhetorical use of Victorian images of women, *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54:1, 82-98, DOI: [10.1080/10570319009374326](https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319009374326)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10570319009374326>



Published online: 06 Jun 2009.



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The Lady, The Whore, and The Spinster: The Rhetorical Use of Victorian Images of Women

CHERYL R. JORGENSEN-EARP

All social movements face the problem of how effectively to alter the dominant discourse and its controlling images. Many groups directly confront this discourse. During the life of some movements, however, there is a subtle, and at times short-lived, strategy of utilizing the very discourse which the movement hopes to change.

The strategic use of the dominant discourse against itself may be seen in an early address by Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Women's Social and Political Union, the "militant" arm of the English women's suffrage movement. Her speech, "The Importance of the Vote," accepted rather than negating the ruling discourse and its view of women. This unusual tactic provides new insight into the ways those with and without power relate to the dominant discourse.

A COMMON THREAD running through studies of rhetoric by and about women¹ concerns the rhetor's need to deal with women's societal images. As Kathy Ferguson observes,

To articulate a substantially different voice for women is to break into the dialectic of speech and social structure, changing the relation between them, and thus altering the process by which the identity of individuals is formed.²

This dialectic places in opposition the images women have of themselves and those of the dominant culture.

Any movement desiring change will face the same pervasive problem: how effectively to alter the dominant discourse and its powerful controlling images. Rhetorical critics have focused on the dramatic tactics of groups who directly confront this discourse. During the life of some movements, however, there is a subtle, and at times short-lived, strategy of utilizing the very discourse which the movement hopes to change. This strategy is worthy of closer examination.

Even revolutionary movements which have divorced themselves from the dominant discourse and the system which formed it find themselves returning to the very discourse they have rejected. As John Campbell

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The author would like to thank John Angus Campbell for his help with the evolution of this paper.

puts it, "If an intellectual change is truly fundamental, how can it be socially intelligible?"³ Revolutionary thought risks being incomprehensible if it is couched in equally revolutionary language. Familiar images which form a bridge to the past allow the rhetor to approach and be understood by a conservative or even reactionary audience. For most audiences, it is "only by utilizing the unquestioned old" that they will ever be reconciled into "facing the problematical new."⁴

Recognition of the practical need to utilize the dominant discourse led Foucault to reject the notion of "a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one."⁵ Instead, Foucault allows us to see discourse as "tactical elements,"⁶ which can shift and move, forming both a discursive strategy *and* its opposing strategy, leading at times to the use of "identical formulas for contrary objectives."⁷ The discourse which "can be both an instrument and an effect of power" may also be "a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy."⁸

The strategic use of the dominant discourse against itself may be seen in an early speech of Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Women's Social and Political Union, the "militant" arm of the English women's suffrage movement. Her address, "The Importance of the Vote," was presented on March 24, 1908 at one of the weekly "at homes" which the Women's Social and Political Union held in the Portman Rooms on Baker Street in London.⁹ This speech was such a coherent summary of the suffrage argument that the W.S.P.U. published it as a separate pamphlet which was sold on the streets and advertised in the *Votes For Women* newspaper.¹⁰ This availability made it possible for Pankhurst to reach not only the faithful but also the male voting populace, with their ability to elect a Parliament sympathetic to women's suffrage. Emmeline Pankhurst's "The Importance of the Vote," functioned, not through negation,¹¹ but through acceptance of the dominant discourse and its view of women. This unusual tactic provides new insight on ways that "the powerful and powerless . . . stand in . . . relation" to the dominant discourse.¹² This study of Pankhurst's speech analyzes how a speaker may utilize the discourse of the dominant culture *as it stands* in order to force revolutionary change within that culture.

THE IMAGE

In 1908, Pankhurst faced a dominant discourse based on a series of controlling images. Through the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, it was the "cult of domesticity"¹³ and its attending pictures of men and women that was a "major recurring image in Victorian literature, art, and social commentary."¹⁴ This cult was firmly based in the concept of "separate spheres." Life in Victorian England was divided into two domains: the public sphere, the arena of business, politics, and the professions, was the exclusive domain of men; the private sphere,

the domain of love, the home, and family, was the world of women.¹⁵ The private sphere of women had as its positive personification the Perfect Lady (True Womanhood), and, as its negative, both the Fallen Woman and the Redundant Woman.¹⁶

Deborah Gorham provides an excellent summary of the role and attributes of the Perfect Lady:

Victorian conceptions of the idealised role of women are epitomized by Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House*, the title of which captures its essence. The ideal woman was willing to be dependent on men and submissive to them, and she would have a preference for a life restricted to the confines of home. . . . she would be free of any trace of anger or hostility. More emotional than man, she was also more capable of self-renunciation.¹⁷

While these roles are varied, two primary characteristics mark the Perfect Lady: submission to/support of the patriarch and gentility.

Despite the copious social legislation affecting marriage in the last half of the nineteenth century, for the Edwardians "the legal position of a wife was merged in that of her husband. 'My wife and I are one, and I am he.'"¹⁸ Women were born to minister, in loving submission, first to their brothers and fathers and later to their husbands. It was their task to serve as a balm for the psychic injuries acquired by men in the public sphere. To fulfill this role well a woman was required to accept that she "has nothing, and is nothing, of herself," that her "experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank. . . ." and that her "very smiles and tears are not exclusively her own."¹⁹

The economic roots of the Perfect Lady image appeared in the concept of gentility. With the Industrial Revolution came the concern that "Philistines, or worse, the populace, were coming to dominate the tone of society."²⁰ Part of a man's general status resided in the way that his wife and home reflected the proper cultural attributes. A woman's entire status resided in the home and family and, without such, a woman had little or no status. For both sexes, then, the cult of domesticity determined one's level in the social world; marriage and the maintenance of domestic life took on an economic cast. So much was marriage a profession for women that one Victorian author lampooned marriage-seeking women as resembling "those flacid Brazilian creepers which cannot exist without support, and which sprawl out their limp tendrils in every direction to find something—no matter what—to hang upon."²¹

Although the Perfect Lady was considered the norm for Victorian/Edwardian society, she did have strong counterparts. The most readily apparent of these was the Fallen Woman, who had strayed from virtue's path and could no longer serve as an ideal. Prostitution was a much-discussed fact of life in Victorian England, where as early as 1850 there were 8,000 known prostitutes in London alone,²² and where the East End murders of 1888 focused attention on the extent of the problem. Although patterns were beginning to change in Edwardian England, the availability of "private," as opposed to commercialized, sex changed substantially only with the upheaval of World War I.²³

The Fallen Woman was in many ways necessary to the survival of the concept of the Perfect Lady. Therefore, "Victorian society and the family spawned two kinds of women, the womanly woman and her negation, the whorely whore: the pure and the impure."²⁴ While the prostitute superficially appeared to threaten the societal norm of domesticity, she actually formed a "symbiotic relationship" with the Victorian/Edwardian matron.²⁵ Besides providing a backdrop against which superior virtue could be displayed, she theoretically served as an "outlet" for male lust. This prevented the husband from making unseemly demands upon his wife.²⁶ There was, therefore, an unstated acceptance in many circles of the "necessary evil" of prostitution.

The assumption is often made that the Fallen Woman label belonged only to prostitutes. The term was not, however, an indication of professional standing. Virtue was so highly valued in the Perfect Lady that even rumor of its loss could consign a woman to the status of Fallen Woman. The Fallen Woman was to be ostracized for "the woman who broke the family circle, be she prostitute, adulterer or divorcée, threatened society's very fabric."²⁷

A third image was needed, in addition to the Perfect Lady and the Fallen Woman, to encompass the numerous widows, divorcees, and never-married women of England. This third image was "what the social critic W. R. Greg called the 'redundant woman . . . who in place of completing, sweetening and embellishing the existence of others [is] compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of [her] own.'"²⁸ The problem of the Redundant Woman's life formed the basis of concerned pamphlets and unkind Music Hall routines. Never-married women were considered failures at their sole purpose in life. Perhaps the most infamous statement of this position came from Eliza Warren in 1865:

Married life is woman's profession; and to this life her training—that of dependence—is modelled. Of course by not getting a husband, or losing him, she may find that she is without resources. All that can be said of her is, she has failed in business; and no social reform can prevent such failures. The mischance of the distressed governess and the unprovided widow is that of every insolvent tradesman. He is to be pitied; but all the Social Congresses in the world will not prevent the possibility of a mischance in the shape of broken-down tradesmen, old maids, or widows.²⁹

The woman was equally upbraided who failed in her task of procreation. Women who were childless were considered likely candidates for neurosis. Such women had failed society and were incapable of compensating through otherwise useful lives, for

The woman who has given birth to a son has fulfilled her 'mission.' The celibate woman—be she as holy as St. Theresa, useful as Miss Nightingale, gifted as Miss Cornwallis,—has entirely missed it. . . .³⁰

These three images formed the feminine pantheon for Victorian society; their strength should not be underestimated. The "cult" which they composed "was an instrument and an effect of power, an element of a discourse that structured the experience of women around the needs of the traditional family and of emergent capitalism."³¹ The fields of thought which supported them were the most influential of their time:

religion, society, and science. Mainstream religions taught that "Woman had been made from and was therefore dependent on man, and she should glory in her God-given weakness."³² Second, societal stability was believed by social critics to rest upon the strength of the patriarchal principle and man's control over his home. Finally, science used Darwinian catch-phrases to promote the idea that "woman's biology was her destiny" and that emancipation in any form would harmfully stress women's reproductive capabilities.³³

Victorian anti-feminist and, later, anti-suffrage rhetoric would use these images as their primary sources of ammunition. The "Antis" derived as their main arguments that:

woman's demands violated the tenets of holy scripture, inevitably would lead to the destruction of society and ignored the inherent physiological differences between the sexes.³⁴

Society generally preserves the images which have served it well, allowing them to become a part of society's formal view of itself. In this way, the images acquire a dangerous stability.³⁵ The domestic image of women was encouraged by grim facts of Victorian life—economic necessity, inefficient birth control, and frequent and dangerous childbirth.³⁶ But as these conditions changed, the image of women did not. Especially in uncertain times, society is so loathe to relinquish its stable images that "as the world moves on, the image does not."³⁷

The separate spheres orientation as a whole arose as an adaptation to the tension, self-doubt and anxiety wrought by the Industrial Revolution. The private sphere was intended as a haven for both men and women from the new harsh realities of public life. However, it survived "from conditions for which it was fit into conditions for which it [was] unfit," a situation which Burke calls "cultural lag."³⁸ By the 20th Century, it was locked into English discourse, a "fossilized institution"³⁹ of considerable influence and menace. This "cult of true womanhood" not only "provided the mythic guidelines for women's role" but functioned as a "discursive strategy that served both to disguise and perpetuate"⁴⁰ the subordinated position of women.

Thus, Pankhurst's strategy for the "Importance of the Vote" speech took shape. She worked within the separate spheres orientation which her audience accepted. But she attempted to change their sense of what, in Burkean terms, was "pious" within that orientation, that "sense of what properly goes with what."⁴¹ She tried to transform *not* the orientation but the view that female suffrage was "impious"⁴² within that orientation. By showing the piety of female suffrage, she established voting as part of a neo-traditional view. Each of the three predominant images of women was woven, unnamed, throughout her speech to one purpose: to demonstrate that the vote would enhance the role of the Perfect Lady while diminishing the problem of Fallen and Redundant Women.

"THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VOTE"

The first dilemma Pankhurst faced can be summarized as follows: if the "perfect lady's sole function was marriage and procreation,"⁴³ how

was Pankhurst to show that the vote was not incompatible with either? Early in the speech she quoted male politicians as saying:

... home is the place for women. Their interests are the rearing and training of children. These are the things that interest women. Politics have nothing to do with these things, and therefore politics do not concern women (p. 446).

It would seem that, were Pankhurst interested in challenging women's traditional role, this would be the ideal point to throw down the gauntlet. But it was only the latter part of this reasoning that she wished to challenge. Acts of Parliament, she said, "decide how women are to live in marriage, how their children are to be trained and educated, and what the future of their children is to be" (p. 446). Politics *do* have an effect upon home and family through the law; and, therefore, politics, and the vote, are every woman's concern.

Women, as presented by Pankhurst, are very different from men and have a unique point of view. Pankhurst, and many pioneers of the women's movement, publicly accepted the traditional view that women approach the world in a different way from men. According to Martha Vicinus, this view led to arguments for the "existence of women's special skills in regard to children, health care, education and domestic morality."⁴⁴ Yet these natural skills and the knowledge which accompanied them were virtually ignored, as Pankhurst saw it, by the Member of Parliament whose "time is fully taken up by attending to the needs of the people who have sent him to Parliament" (p. 446).

One of the first reasons, therefore, that Pankhurst gave for women needing the vote was that "in the government of the country the women's point of view should be put forward" (p. 446). Hers was not the argument that women are as "good" as men, in terms of intelligence and logic, for the examples she gave in support stress the "womanly" attributes of instinct and experience. That women are intelligent and logical was, of course, a tacit assumption of many of her statements. Explicitly, she contented herself to recognize that women are different from men, that their unique concerns are not trivial but basic to society, and that "it seems almost impossible for men . . . to recognize that there is any woman's side at all" (p. 448).

If women have a unique viewpoint, they have an equally unique role in society, that of nurturers. Even when on the offensive against John Burns and his proposed law that women not be allowed to work until their children are six months of age, Pankhurst carefully tied women's right to work with housekeeping concerns and infant mortality. She spoke of a Lancashire working woman with a small child "well dressed, very blithe, and looking well fed" (p. 452). Pankhurst reported telling the woman about John Burns' law, to which the woman replied:

I don't know what we shall do then. I suppose we shall have to clem.' [Pankhurst continued] I don't know whether you all know our Lancashire word 'clem.' When we say clem, we mean starve. In thousands of homes in Lancashire, if we get Mr. John Burns' proposal carried into law, little children, now well clothed and well fed and well cared for, will have clemmed before many months are over (p. 452).

Pankhurst demonstrated how Burns' proposed law could actually reduce the care this mother was providing for her child. She showed that the law trespassed upon the sacred area of a woman's traditional nurturing role—to the detriment of mother, child, and family life. Pankhurst's strongest volley was directed to those who would interfere: "We should like to say this to Mr. John Burns, that when women get the vote, they will take very much better care of babies than men have been able to do" (p. 452).

Far from deriding woman's place in society, Pankhurst used it to advantage to show how the vote would help the Perfect Lady in her traditional nurturing role. In discussing the marriage laws, she focused at one point upon the irony that "By English law no married woman exists as the mother of the child she brings into the world. In the eyes of the law she is not the parent of her child" (p. 447). The law was thus shown to be both absurd and dangerous for society, for it robbed a woman of her right as a mother, a right which would likely find support in even the most conservative Edwardian circles.

As a complement to the obsession with home and hearth, Pankhurst presented the Perfect Lady as possessing an air of delicacy and refinement. The Victorian woman was shown as having an other-worldly quality for, as Peter Cominos notes, "after all, women were angels born, men animals."⁴⁵ Pankhurst described an incident of protest in the following manner:

when a few women ventured to make a small protest and suggested that perhaps it would be best to give to women, the mothers of the race, an opportunity of expressing themselves on the subject, they were characterized as disgraceful, and turned out of the meeting for daring to raise their voices in protest (p. 450).

Such delicacy of phrasing and uncharacteristic hesitancy summons the image of refined, modest ladies set upon by brutish louts for merely venturing "a small protest." Through the technique of suggestion, Pankhurst changed the common image of the mannish "Suff," stridently demanding the vote, to that of the Perfect Lady sweetly imploring a favor.

If Pankhurst presented a conservative image of woman as Perfect Lady, she provided an equally traditional, although less flattering, view of man. In her reporting of the address by Burns to the National Conference on Infant Mortality, she said that "it makes one smile to hear a statesman comparing whiskey and milk" (p. 450). The image was that of the bumbling man in the nursery, a staple of domestic comedy. Men were shown to be fumbling and incompetent in areas which really were "women's work." Pankhurst told her audience that "since 1870 men have been trying to find out how to educate children" (p. 449). Their failure could be traced to their straying outside of men's proper sphere of interest; when it came to matters concerning children, men must "learn from women some of those lessons that the long experience of ages has taught to them" (p. 449). Ironically, these same incompetent men and their laws were shown as even invading the delivery room, the ultimate feminine

domain. Only when women attained the vote would such misguided interference be lessened, and it would be "made possible for women to manage the business which men have always conceded is the business of women" (p. 454). As with the Perfect Lady, Pankhurst implied, the Perfect Gentleman should know his place.

These images are so strong that one must wonder if Pankhurst was being ironic. Irony, ridicule, and sarcasm are rhetorical tools which she used over the years to great effect. If this is so, it may be asked if the ironic tone evident in this speech was directed *at* the traditionalists. Could it be that she was only "having them on"? If the irony Pankhurst used here is examined closely, however, it can be seen as working *for* the traditional view. Pankhurst can be placed, using the categories devised by Kaufer and Neuwirth for categorizing ironic communication, in the group of *"Ironists who ridicule listeners who subscribe to but fail to conform to commonly held norms."*⁴⁶ A typical example from the speech concerned Cabinet Ministers making decisions on domestic issues:

Well, we cannot wonder that they are deciding what sort of milk the babies are to have, for it is only a few months ago that they decided how babies should be brought into the world, and who should officiate on the occasion (p. 450).

In this statement Pankhurst ridiculed a group of men who in their positions embodied the status quo, yet who acted as if they did not know that babies are "women's work." Far from attacking the notion of babies as women's primary preoccupation, she used this norm shared between herself and her audience to poke fun at those who violated the norm.

Pankhurst was not looking for a conversion experience on the part of her audience where "Old linkages [would be] ripped apart, new linkages [would be] welded"⁴⁷ Pankhurst took great care to show that the vote would not end the traditional "way to the world" as her audience knew it. The Perfect Lady, as she presented her, acknowledged the differences between men and women, accepted her societal role, and did not "want to imitate men or to be like men" (p. 454). One of the mainstays of Anti-suffrage cartoons was the image of the poor, tired husband home from his day's labor only to find that he must mind the baby or do the dishes so that his wife may prepare a speech or attend a public meeting.⁴⁸ Pankhurst was careful to state that "no woman who enters into this agitation need feel that she has got to give up a single one of her woman's duties in the home" (p. 454). The traditional values will not end; the vote will merely increase women's sense of home and family. "After all," said Pankhurst, "home is a very, very big thing indeed" (p. 454). Women are shown as mothers to the nation; "home" is expanded to the boundaries of all England.

If Pankhurst relied heavily upon the "Angel in the House" for emotional impact, she touched more fleetingly upon her counterpart, "the Fallen Angel." Given the extent of the problem of prostitution and the unwed mother, it is of particular interest that Pankhurst did *not* rely heavily upon the image of the Fallen Woman.⁴⁹ This image would serve

as a mainstay in her later speeches. The reasons for such an omission here lay in the relationship that prostitution had to Victorian/Edwardian society. To attack the problem of Fallen Women might imply an attack by Pankhurst upon the men who caused their downfall. Of the two major theories of the time concerning women's entrance into prostitution, neither was flattering to men. One theory was based on economic necessity. Married or unmarried women with insufficient income, and often with children or siblings to feed, would "dabble" in prostitution as a supplement. If such were the case, men could be seen as unchivalrously taking advantage of, rather than alleviating, women's plight. Then, too, women were not seen as sexual beings; they were believed to lack sexual desire until it was awakened in them by men. Once this happened the woman was "ruined" and there could be no going back. Not only the never-married but any woman with sexual experience was in danger, for

Almost without exception a woman who was divorced or separated from her husband, whatever the cause, was a woman with a 'lost reputation'—an Edwardian invitation to lust if ever there was one.⁵⁰

The view of man as "seducer of the innocent" was unflattering and not one Pankhurst wished to dwell upon. In later speeches, as she realized that conciliatory efforts had failed, she redefined men as the "enemy" to women's well-being.⁵¹ When this change in tactic occurred, Pankhurst relied upon stories of "lost" teenage girls and their illegitimate children.

Pankhurst's rhetorical hand was stayed by more than the desire to avoid offense to male voters. Despite her numbers and visibility, the common prostitute was not considered a fit subject for either art or public discussion.⁵² Occasionally an artist could skirt this problem by turning his or her subject into "a religious, an almost saintly symbol—the woman taken in adultery, the Magdalene."⁵³ It was this "more to be pitied than censured" approach which Pankhurst employed. Her sole example was of "the mother—the unfortunate mother" (p. 448) of an illegitimate child. Again, Pankhurst chose not to challenge traditional morality; she did not lessen the responsibility of the Fallen Woman but extended responsibility for the child's upkeep to the father of the child. This view would resonate with her audience's belief in man as protector/benefactor of women yet would avoid conjuring a seamier, possibly offensive image in their minds.

Finally, Pankhurst turned to another category of women who were considered equally disruptive to society, Redundant Women. Although not working by omission as with the Fallen Woman, Pankhurst was gingerly in her treatment of issues involving this second negative image. As with the Fallen Woman, the Redundant Woman, in many of her forms, was necessary to the cult of domesticity. Governesses and servants were useful if only to highlight the position of the patriarch's wife and the patriarch's ability to support her.

Despite the potential usefulness of the Redundant Woman however, the belief persisted that all unmarried women were somehow tainted or "unnatural." Politically involved women, especially the suffragettes, were often tarred with this same brush. If only the "Suffs" were attractive to men themselves, they would cease clamoring for the vote. Ignoring the numerous married women with children among the suffrage ranks, the old joke ran, "Votes for women? What they need is Blokes for Women."⁵⁴ Walter Heape in his [1913] *Sex Antagonism* called this "Female Army" "the waste products of our female population."⁵⁵

With little sympathy attending "spinsters," and even less given to the divorced, Pankhurst left the issue of marital status alone and divided working women into "sweated women" and "professional women." "Sweating," exploitative labor at low wages, was considered the major social problem of the Edwardian age.⁵⁶ Not that Pankhurst was on particularly safe ground here, for the middle-classes "could ruthlessly exploit the working woman but they did not want to be reminded of that exploitation."⁵⁷

Pankhurst, therefore, turned attention from general economics to approach the question of working women from a personal and moral angle. Far from being an extraneous part of society, working women, such as the Lancashire cotton workers, "belong to the aristocracy of Industry" (p. 451). By not forcing the Redundant Woman into the ranks of the "sweated," Pankhurst implied, society would be amply repaid by their productivity.

Pankhurst showed how only the vote would draw Government attention to the plight of women workers. The proof of the vote's power could be seen by an examination of:

... the Government's proposals. What do you get in the forefront of their programme? You get an eight hours' day for miners. But you get nothing for the sweated woman. . . . The miner is being attended to because he, the miner, has got a vote (p. 452-453).

By gaining the attention of the Government, the "sweated woman" would be prevented from becoming a Fallen Woman. She would be able to earn adequate pay to allow her "to live at least a moral and a decent life" (p. 453). By combining images and warning that the Redundant Woman could "fall," Pankhurst argued that society had a moral duty toward these women.

The professional woman is shown as a potential savior for the sweated woman and others in need. Pankhurst first focuses on "what a long and a weary struggle it has been for women to get into the professions" (p. 453). She moves quickly, however, from the hiring problems facing qualified women to the *need* for professional women in certain fields. She then works her way around to her major point: that the professional work of the Redundant Woman could still follow the accepted tradition for women. Women were being prevented from exercising their proper interests for:

Women inspectors of schools are greatly needed. Moreover, there is not a single woman Poor Law inspector, nor a woman inspector of workhouses and workhouse hospitals. And yet it is to the workhouses and the workhouse hospitals that we send old people, sick people, and little children (p. 454).

The old, the sick and little children are, of course, the domain of women. The vote would give women the power needed to enter professions where they could fulfill their moral obligation to society. And so, Pankhurst implied, even the Redundant Woman would be better equipped to blend into traditional society through the benefits accrued by the vote.

It is difficult to gauge the success of this early Pankhurst strategy because of the intensification of militancy in 1909, the year following the speech. Until then, W.S.P.U. militancy consisted mainly of "heckling Liberal party speakers at by-elections and demanding party support for a woman's suffrage bill."⁵⁸ General support and subscriptions rose during this pre-1909 time until subscriptions reached £18,000.⁵⁹ In June 1909, after Pankhurst and a deputation were turned away from Parliament, the W.S.P.U. decided that words were inadequate and must be replaced with more militant deeds. Windows were broken in government buildings, women were arrested, and so began the round of militant actions, prison, and hunger strikes which would last until World War I.⁶⁰

Whether continued highly-crafted appeals to the dominant discourse would have brought success is hard to say. We do know that the Suffragettes considered this appeal as too slow and too much in keeping with the approaches of the 19th Century reformist suffragists. The new policy of militancy which took its place has been widely viewed as a "radical break" with the tactics of the early movement.⁶¹ Yet, I would maintain that militancy was a logical extension of the appeal to "True Womanhood." The cult of domesticity made much of woman's proper self-sacrificial nature and her exalted moral sensibilities. Although not often publically acknowledged, the suffragettes saw women as the moral superiors of men.⁶² The movement decided to tap into this moral strength, into the self-sacrifice, idealism, and desire to serve ingrained by the cult of domesticity. Through arrest, prison and hunger strikes, women were asked to sacrifice themselves for the Cause as they had sacrificed themselves for home and family.⁶³ In effect, the movement still used the dominant discourse of the day as a basis for a new strategy.

CONCLUSION

From its inception the Women's Social and Political Union fit the movement pattern known as "establishment-conflict." Emmeline Pankhurst and other Union leaders served as "aggressor-spokeswomen" who set themselves in opposition to the established order.⁶⁴ The drama evoked by the clash with the establishment brought the movement to public attention. In this type of movement, "radical division defines the movement and gives rise to its strategies."⁶⁵ Yet, as this examination of "The Importance of the Vote" has shown, Pankhurst's early rhetoric

is not a "match" with the oppositional discourse usually found in establishment-conflict movements.

With its emphasis on the piety that change had with status-quo values, Pankhurst's rhetoric resembled that of an "innovational movement," the polar opposite of the establishment-conflict movement. The "aggressor-spokesmen/women" of an innovational movement are establishment insiders who seek innovations within traditional institutions in order to better fulfill traditional values.⁶⁶ As if in an innovational movement, Pankhurst spoke "with the expectation that the changes . . . [would] not disturb the symbols and constraints of existing values or modify the social hierarchy,"⁶⁷ Pankhurst was an establishment outsider who spoke here with an insider voice.

An analogy may best illuminate what this strategy reveals about the use of dominant discourse to bring about change. Dominant discourse and its images give structure to the concept of "woman." In the Feminist view, this very structure builds a "wall" around women constraining movement, hampering growth, and placing a limit around what it properly means to be female. Feminists have tended to mount an assault on this wall from the outside, resisting utilizing the dominant images of women except to stand in opposition to them. The desire has been to "preserve the outsider's view and the outsider's consciousness,"⁶⁸ to respond to the dominant discourse only "by their antagonism toward that discourse."⁶⁹

Emmeline Pankhurst took the opposite tack and made herself at home within the very walls of the dominant discourse. By showing the piety of a proposed action (voting) with old beliefs, she made conservative discourse appear untrue to *itself* if it did not comply with her demands. Far from glossing over injustice, her technique made societal unfairness visible to conservative eyes. Once she gained control of these images she could then subtly broaden their definitions, expanding, and potentially exploding the wall the images build around women's lives. Pankhurst thus exercised "the ability to break out of the constraints of an episteme by engaging in discourse that reveals these constraints."⁷⁰

To move from analogy to rhetorical theory, Pankhurst's strategy gives a practical insight to the "situational rhetoric"/"rhetorical situation" debate. Briefly, Lloyd Bitzer argued that "a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance."⁷¹ In this view societal need establishes discourse. Richard Vatz countered this claim with the idea that "situations are rhetorical."⁷² The rhetor has the power to construct needs and give them their reality through rhetoric. "Meaning," Vatz said, "is not discovered in situations but created by rhetors."⁷³

Many students of discourse see the validity of both opinions. For example, Carole Blair places Foucault somewhere between Bitzer and Vatz; for, in acknowledging the dual nature of discourse, he aligns himself with both views.⁷⁴ It is this same middle ground which Emmeline

Pankhurst's strategy holds. She saw that the cult of domesticity grew out of definable needs of the Industrial Revolution and that the dominant feminine images reflected a truth about her society. She saw, too, that such powerful images would constitute future societal needs, would define behaviors in keeping with themselves and would perpetuate their own existence.

A rhetor seeking change must gain control over the images developed from societal need and must influence the power they, in turn, have to define societal need. Pankhurst's skill lay in "impressing the old language . . . into service for [her] new meanings."⁷⁵ When this strategy is successful, there is a radical shift, not in the language and the images the language summons to mind, but in the social meaning of the images. This strategy allows the speaker to "make sense" about the future to a public rooted in the political present, for the "epochal transformations in human self-understanding" which will guide the future "always subsume earlier patterns as the ground of their intelligibility."⁷⁶ By working within established identities and traditions, by moving incrementally, even radical change may be viewed as part of a new consensus.

Contemporary American feminists have a pressing need to understand this strategy for they are still grappling with the cult of domesticity. The Perfect Lady is still resurrected when political issues are raised that touch on women's roles. The "Positive Woman" touted by Phyllis Schlafly in the STOP ERA campaign is a version of the Perfect Lady surprisingly unaltered by the passage of a century.⁷⁷ Aspects of the Fallen Woman image color the rhetoric of those dealing with the abortion controversy, contraception availability, AIDS education, and rape/murder trials. A recent variation in murder defense is to claim that death occurred during a bout of "rough sex" requested by the female victim. "Some are calling it a new twist on the old trial strategy of blaming the victim. 'The she-asked-for-it defense doesn't work anymore,' says Harvard University Law Professor Alan Dershowitz. 'So now we're hearing she demanded it.'"⁷⁸ And those who think we have left the fears of Redundant Woman behind might consider the ballyhoo which accompanied the recent, statistically-spurious Ivy League study of women's chances of marriage.⁷⁹ The concept that women might have waited too long (trading, it was smugly said, career for marriage) made instant headlines. Rather than waiting for the times to be more propitious for a discourse of change, feminists should deal with these images as they exist today.

A specific example of how the Pankhurst strategy can press an establishment image into service for change may be found in the "Caretaker" image. This image is viewed as an appealing yet dangerous one for feminists to use. The appeal of the image is that caretaking is a "truth" which many women share;⁸⁰ the danger is in its past link to a subservient role.⁸¹ The useful strategy is *not* to embrace the image

blindly, a situation which has caused "recent feminist celebrations of mothering . . . to sound like academic versions of a Hallmark card."⁸² It is, instead, to accept the "Caretaker" as a legitimate image which developed out of society's need for nurturance. Feminists can then claim this image for their own discourse and control its future direction by expanding it to include men. The Pankhurst approach of co-opting an established image may prevent feminists clinging "to the feminine mystique for themselves instead of emphasizing that charity, mercy and tenderness [are] good *human* traits."⁸³

When necessity has forced those in power to redefine images of the dominant discourse, they have done so skillfully. Recruitment posters for women war workers in both world conflicts pictured traditional women altered to accommodate a new reality. This skillful utilization of images came from the establishment's sense of proprietorship over these images. Those seeking change should not relinquish any powerful established image—be it True Womanhood, God, or The Flag—to the opposition without exploring its potential for rehabilitation. There is truth in Foucault's claim that "discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it."⁸⁴ This fact was embodied in a tactic fleetingly attempted over eighty years ago. A revival of this strategy may strengthen the muffled voice of change in a conservative age.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, Charles Conrad, "The Transformation of the 'Old Feminist' Movement," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67 (1981): 284-297; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Stanton's 'The Solitude of Self': A Rationale for Feminism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66 (1980): 304-312; Phyllis M. Japp, "Esther or Isaiah?: The Abolitionist-Feminist Rhetoric of Angelina Grimke," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 71 (1985): 335-348; and Patti P. Gillespie, "Feminist Theatre: A Rhetorical Phenomenon," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64 (1978): 284-294. For an overview of women in the mass media see, Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, eds. *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Research on the Equal Rights Amendment includes Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, "Feminists of Faith: Sonia Johnson and the Mormons for ERA," *The Central States Speech Journal*, 36 (1985): 123-137; Martha Solomon, "The 'Positive Woman's' Journey: A Mythic Analysis of the Rhetoric of STOP ERA," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (1979): 262-274; and Sonja K. Foss, "The Equal Rights Amendment Controversy: Two Worlds in Conflict," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (1979): 275-288.

2. Kathy Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 154.

3. John Angus Campbell, "Scientific Revolution and the Grammar of Culture: The Case of Darwin's *Origin*," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72 (1986): 351.

4. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: New Republic, 1935), 116.

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), 100.

6. Foucault, 101.

7. Foucault, 100.

8. Foucault, 101.

9. *An Historical Anthology of Select British Speeches*, eds. Donald C. Bryant, Carroll C. Arnold, Frederick W. Haberman, Richard Murphy, Karl R. Wallace (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1967), 444. The transcript for Pankhurst's "The Importance of the Vote" may be found in this anthology (pp. 445-455) and all quotations taken from the speech are from this same source.

10. According to David Mitchell in the biography *Queen Christabel: A Biography of Christabel Pankhurst* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977), the *Votes for Women* newspaper was entering approximately 16,000 homes by 1908-1909. Although the paper was generally purchased by women, it was assumed by the movement that males in these households would also read it, if only out of curiosity. The movement also counted upon reports of their speeches in the general press—*The Daily Graphic*, *The Standard*, *The Manchester Chronicle*, among others—to spread their message to those neutral and opposed.

11. To see how the recent women's movement utilized the negation of men, see Brenda Robinson Hancock, "Affirmation by Negation in the Women's Liberation Movement," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58 (1972).

12. Ferguson, *The Case*, 154.

13. Conrad, 285.

14. Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 4.

15. Gorham, 4.

16. These three images of women have been considered, separately or together, by many who study the Victorian period. See Barbara Welter "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, XVIII (1966): 151-174. This article is reprinted in Welter's *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976). One particularly illuminating article is Helene Roberts' "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin," a study of artists' views of women in the early years of Victoria's reign. Helene E. Roberts, "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 46.

17. Gorham, 4-5.

18. Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 169.

19. Sara Ellis, "The Daughters of England, 1842," in *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement*, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1979), 15.

20. Carol Christ, "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) 146.

21. Josephine Butler, "Woman's Work and Woman's Culture, 1869," in Hollis, 10.

22. Roberts, 63.

23. Judith Walkowitz, "The Making of an Outcast Group: Prostitutes and Working Women in 19th Century Plymouth and Southampton" in *A Widening Sphere*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 91.

24. Peter T. Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict," *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 168.

25. Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, *Free and Ennobled: Source Reading in the Development of Victorian Feminism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), 2.

26. Bauer and Ritt, 2.

27. Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, xiv.

28. Roberts, 57.

29. Eliza Warren, *How I Managed my Children* (London: Houston and Wright, 1865), 60.

30. Francis Power Cobbe, "The Final Cause of Women" in Hollis, 23.

31. Ferguson, *The Case*, 50.

32. Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public: 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1979), 3.

33. Hollis, 4.

34. Conrad, 288.

35. Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 79.
36. Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 59.
37. Boulding, 79.
38. Burke, 227.
39. Burke, 67.
40. Ferguson, *The Case*, 49.
41. Burke, 100.
42. Burke, 106.
43. Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, x.
44. Vicinus, *A Widening Sphere*, x.
45. Cominos, 166.
46. David S. Kaufer and Christine M. Neuwirth, "Foregrounding Norms and Ironic Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68 (1982): 33.
47. Burke, 204.
48. Harrison, 140.
49. "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."
"The dog did nothing in the night-time."
"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes."
- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "Silver Blaze," *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, Vol. II, ed. William S. Baring-Gould (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1967), 277.
50. Crow, 171.
51. An examination of this complex change in Pankhurst must wait until another time for its full development. A sense of this change in approach can be obtained by a reading of her Albert Hall Address, October 17, 1912.
52. Roberts, 63.
53. Roberts, 67.
54. Crow, 81.
55. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 262.
56. Crow, 38.
57. Roberts, 63.
58. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 253.
59. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 253.
60. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 253.
61. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 250.
62. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 252.
63. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 250-252.
64. For information on establishment-conflict movements, see Leland M. Griffin: "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 38 (1952) and "A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Movements," in *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, ed. William H. Rueckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969). See also Robert S. Cathcart, "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically," *Western Speech*, 36 (1972).
65. Ralph R. Smith and Russel R. Windes, "The Innovational Movement: A Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61 (1975).
66. Smith and Windes, 143. Smith and Windes use as an example of an innovational movement the Sunday School movement of the 19th Century.
67. Smith and Windes, 143.
68. Adrienne Rich, "Privilege, Power and Tokenism," *MS*, 8 (September 1979): 44.
69. Ferguson, *The Case*, 155.
70. Carole Blair and Martha Cooper, "The Humanist Turn in Foucault's Rhetoric of Inquiry," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987): 156.
71. Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Contemporary Rhetoric*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1972), 41.

72. Richard Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 6 (1973): 159-161.
73. Vatz, 157.
74. Carole Blair, "The Statement: Foundation of Foucault's Historical Criticism," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, (51) 1987: 379.
75. Campbell, 362.
76. Campbell, 369.
77. Solomon, 262-274.
78. *Time*, 131.21(1988): 55.
79. Eloise Salholz, "Too Late for Prince Charming," *Newsweek* 107 (June 2, 1986): 54-57.
80. Ferguson, *The Case*, 158.
81. Ferguson, *The Case*, 26.
82. Ferguson, *The Case*, 171.
83. Hancock, 269.
84. Foucault, 100-101.